

# Neighborhood Networks

## NEWS

Volume 2, Number 2



## Clarendon Hill Seniors Excited About Computers

**F**or seniors at Clarendon Hill Towers, technology isn't just for the young, but for the young at heart. Celebrating their Grand Opening and national recognition as the 100th Neighborhood Network Center February 24, residents and community leaders toured the facility, viewed the educational programs, and logged onto the Internet.

Assistant Secretary of Multifamily Housing Nicolas Retsinas said he is very proud of Clarendon Hill Towers' Computer Learning Center because it exemplifies a truly successful Neighborhood Networks Center. In addition to several HUD officials, more than 150 people from the community attended the

ribbon-cutting ceremony. The Clarendon Hill Towers Computer Learning Center is a national model for all Neighborhood Network Centers and serves not only the senior population living there, but children and single mothers searching for education and career training. "The residents are really, really excited about this," said Joe Mulcahy, president of the Clarendon Hill Towers Tenant Association and the driving force behind the center's existence.

"I signed up for a class. I'm going to accomplish it. The best thing that ever happened to me was moving onto this property," said Mary Hollace, resident and Vice President of the Clarendon Hill Towers Board of Directors.

Doreen Lopes also expects to sign up and has even volunteered for the computer learning center's Steering Committee. "I think it's marvelous to have it in the place you live in. I'm really looking forward to the classes," she said, adding that many residents will look forward to being involved in a new adventure. Resident Dorothy Arthurs said she has never seen anything like it.

The computer learning center includes 12 networked IBM-based 586-pentium computers with 17-inch monitors, which help address sight impairments, explained Rich Collins, president and owner of 3X Software in Baintree, Massachusetts. The help of Collins was vital to the center. "He is the heart of my organization and led me the entire way," said Mr. Mulcahy.

Organizers plan to graduate 500 students during the next year. "It's not far reaching because we're doing it. We've already had 100 graduates, and we've only been open for a month," said Mr. Collins.

The Introduction to Computers classes started January 13. Students must pass this five-hour course, designed by a partner, and a 75-question test, before they can move on to the more specialized courses. Mr. Mulcahy said the course is great because it starts from the beginning. "I learned more in this course than I did after years of trying to teach myself," Mr. Mulcahy said.

"Approximately 25-30 percent of the residents living at Clarendon Hill Towers are looking to better themselves in regards to their employment," said Mr. Collins, referring to the resident survey.

*Inside*

**Urban Institute studies the challenge of becoming self-sufficient**

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**YOUR ONLINE ACCESS TO OPPORTUNITY**



*Clarendon residents try out the new computer learning center with the help of Assistant Secretary for Multifamily Housing Nicolas Retsinas.*



*Assistant Secretary Retsinas cuts the ribbon at the Clarendon Hill Towers NN Center with Joe Mulcahy, Tenant Association President.*

He said the computer learning center will provide an important role in helping unemployed residents become employable or to get ahead in their current job.

Stanley Wood, resident and treasurer of the Clarendon Hill Towers Tenant Association said the senior community is considering a volunteer babysitting service to help single mothers who want to use the facility, but who have children who need supervision during the classes. "With this computer learning center, we're helping residents better themselves, improve their wages and style of living," said Mr. Wood.

### **Partners**

Polaroid Corporation provided educational software and furniture for the cen-

ter. Though Mr. Collins is the owner of 3X Software, he knew Polaroid's Bill Munzert, a professional educator, who produced the education curriculum. "The materials are great for stand-up teaching. They also provide self-paced computer lessons. These are great because residents can learn at their own pace and not be dependent upon paid instructors," said Mr. Munzert. "We wanted the curriculum to fit the tenants and their needs," he said.

Clarendon Computer Learning Center instructors are currently searching for software to support students with learning disabilities and work with school systems in meeting these student's needs. Anderson SoftTeach offered multimedia materials at half

price, which saved the center thousands of dollars, according to Mr. Munzert. Two interns from Lesley College are not only instructing the residents, but are also taking part in helping them plan for the future by working on the steering committee. "We couldn't pay for their work," said Mr. Mulcahy.

His advice to other center coordinators is to surround themselves with professionals and remain positive. "This is America and you can do anything you put your mind to," said Mr. Mulcahy. "You just have to be motivated and put the work into it. Partner and talk to people, corporations, anyone." □

*Susette Ritenour*



## Shelter Hill Apartments Mill Valley, California

**A**t Shelter Hill Apartments, the focus is on successful sustainability of the Neighborhood Networks effort and microenterprise. By the end of April, all 75 units on this property were wired for a computer. According to Kerry Peirson, Neighborhood Networks Coordinator, he is searching for computer donations. "We (the residents) want these computers to be in each apartment. We don't want the computers connected just to the Internet, but so that we can form work groups within the community," he said.

Peirson is hoping residents eventually establish their own business, a unique opportunity for microenterprise. "Employers could take advantage of a well-trained work force and not have to spend the money on a training facility," said Peirson. He said the center is collaborating with SofTech, a local software developer, to create an Internet navigational tool called The Shelter Hill Family Challenge. The software helps children and adults search the World Wide Web. "We're hoping to market the product or put it on our website. We may use this to produce income for sustainability," he said.

The center at Shelter Hill opened its doors in August 1996. Start-up costs were financed by the Nathan Cummings Foundation, Pacific Bell, and the Interfaith Housing Foundation. The center offers a variety of programs, including afterschool activities, typing, and computer repair, building, and configuration. To support its activities, the center has nine 486 PCs—all of which have access to the Internet.

Two residents have paid positions to support center activities. The center's partner, WebStarr, will pay resident youth to participate in their advanced computer training program. The residents of Shelter Hill are unique in that they see their community as an economic enterprise and are wiring every apartment unit to the Internet so that businesses can bring their work to them.

Several partners have been instrumental in the center's success. The Marin Computer Resource Center provides an instructor to teach computer repair. Marin County's MIDAS (Marin Information Data Access System) program provides residents with Internet access. Pacific Telesis covered the cost for frame relay switches, which permit the rapid transfer of data and enable residents to telecommute. □

*Kimberley Norwood*

For more information, contact Kerry Peirson at  
**415-383-3989**

## Neighborhood Networks signs on New Partners

United Way of America and the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) have agreed to become national partners of the Neighborhood Networks initiative. The initiative coincides with a national effort of President Clinton to assist welfare reform mandates by challenging community commitments.

"The United Way of America plans to share information on the potential role that a local United Way can play in supporting a Neighborhood Networks Center, including technical support, personal contacts, organizational development, volunteer resources and possibly funding," said Eric Muschler, director of the housing and community development initiative for United Way.

Locating computers in the northwest is getting easier thanks to a recent agreement between GSA (to learn more about GSA, look up their website at <http://www.gsa.gov/>) and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Representatives from GSA's Northwest/Arctic Region and HUD's Washington State Office signed a two-year agreement "to join in providing resources and support" for participating HUD-assisted and -insured properties Washington state.

GSA will lend key support in finding, transferring, and storing surplus computers owned by the Federal Government. The agency will notify HUD when such surpluses are available and will expedite the necessary processing of paperwork. It will also provide free temporary storage space for all donated computers while such computers await servicing and rehabilitation.

Thus far, HUD's Washington state office has received approximately 100 surplus personal computers (PCs), mostly 386s. Seventy-five percent of those PCs have been rehabilitated with the help of private volunteers and sought by private and public housing properties.

HUD officials are hoping to replicate similar agreements with GSA in other regions of the country. □



# Seniors and Technology Profiled in New Video

Computers represent the future and provide the backbone of the information superhighway. But there is still a myth that computers are for young people. At Neighborhood Networks we know first hand that seniors use and learn more about computers every day.

Several Neighborhood Networks Centers have seniors cruising the Internet and experiencing the convenience of electronic messaging. Multifamily properties with senior residents should encourage more people to become involved in the activities of a Neighborhood Networks Center.

A new video entitled, "Neighborhood Networks: The Senior Connection" highlights some of the ways seniors are participating in computer activities in NN Centers. The video also reflects the growing interest that senior residents have in computer technology, and new software applications.

Each HUD field office recently received two copies of this video. Neighborhood Networks Coordinators can use this video to understand how a Neighborhood Networks Center can serve this important group of residents. You may also use it for: outreach, marketing, promotion and educational activities.

This is a tool, not a how-to video, and is designed to showcase the importance of establishing computer learning centers in elderly housing. If you have suggestions for future video topics, please let us know. If you would like additional copies of this video, please call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at 1-888-312-2743. For more information on Neighborhood Networks and Seniors, or a list of interesting senior-oriented websites, log onto the NN website at <http://www.hud.gov/nnw/nnwindex.html>. □



## Department of Education Distributes Free Reading Materials to NN Centers

**R**ead\*Write\*Now, a national initiative of the U.S. Department of Education, is a student reading program created to improve reading and writing achievement among elementary and high school students. In partnership with Neighborhood Networks, the Department of Education is sending each Neighborhood Networks Center, and HUD NN Coordinator, a free Read\*Write\*Now materials kit.

The Read\*Write\*Now program is part of the America Reads Challenge, President Clinton's five-year, \$2.75 billion commitment to local communities and organizations to ensure that all children can read well and independently by the end of the third grade. This two-year-old volunteer reading program is slated to reach 1.5 million children.

The Read\*Write\*Now initiative focuses on four specific environments: home, after-school, the computer world, and the consumer world, according to Department of Education. Neighborhood Networks Centers serving as a learning environment brings together school aged children and the computer world.

Online Service Coordinators looking to improve instruction, training, communication and to provide guidance for reading and writing, may want to incorporate the Read\*Write\*Now materials into the center's activities. Each kit includes:

an activities book, a vocabulary log, a bookmark, and two certificates.

Children are asked to read for 30 minutes a day, five days a week during the summer. Volunteer partners work with children at least one or two of the five days for 30 minutes and children learn one new vocabulary word each day. Children are then encouraged to visit the library on a regular basis and apply for a library card.

You can access materials for the Read\*Write\*Now initiative from the Internet using the education department's website at:

**WWW**  
*internet*  
**<http://www.ed.gov>**

Select  
**Secretary's Initiatives**  
Click on  
**America Reads Challenge**  
Scroll down to and click on  
**Read\*Write\*Now**  
Click on  
**Initiatives**  
Select and click on  
**America Reads Challenge:**  
**Read\*Write\*Now**  
To learn more about the  
**Read\*Write\*Now**  
initiative you also may call  
**1-800-USA-LEARN**

# Krista Olson and LaDonna Pavetti

## Challenges to Moving from Welfare to Work

As states and communities begin implementing welfare reform, the focus is on placing people in jobs leading to economic independence. But what will people need to really become independent? Will job skills alone ready residents for the workplace and a life without government assistance? An Urban Institute study presented in May 1996 suggests that families face many challenges in addition to lacking job skills when attempting to become self-sufficient. The following is a summary of the key findings of this study. We encourage coordinators, property owners and individuals working with welfare recipients to take a closer look at this topic when establishing programs and curricula.

**Welfare recipients, like many non-welfare families, experience a broad range of family and personal issues that make employment difficult.**

Through an analysis of literature, eight major personal and family challenges that may affect a recipient's transition from welfare to work were identified.

Most welfare recipients experience at least one potential barrier to employment, with low basic skills being the most common.

Analysis of data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) reveals that almost 90 percent of current recipients between ages 27 and 35 experience one of five potential barriers to employment (low basic skills, substance abuse, a health limitation, depression, or a child with a chronic medical condition

or serious disability)... Low basic skills are much more common than the other potential barriers to employment included in this analysis. About one-third of recipients score in the bottom percentile of the Women's Distribution of the Armed Forces Qualifying Test, a test of basic skills that is highly correlated with employment and earnings...

The majority of recipients who experience potential barriers to employment work, but do so intermittently.

Although employment is common among welfare recipients, continuous employment is not. Only 11 percent of working recipients reporting a serious barrier reported being employed for a full

year, compared to 27 percent of those who did not report a serious barrier.

The one-quarter of the Aid to Families and Dependent Children (AFDC) caseload who report a potentially serious barrier to employment, and have no recent attachment to the labor force, are likely to need more assistance to succeed in the labor market than most traditional welfare-to-work programs provide. Almost twice as many may need additional assistance to maintain steady employment.

This group of recipients, who account for about 25 percent of the AFDC caseload, are likely to need more assistance than those in traditional programs. Considering the majority of employed recipients facing potentially serious barriers to employment work intermittently, the percentage of the caseload likely to need additional assistance to fare well within a time-limited welfare system, increases dramatically to 51 percent.

*The Urban Institute  
Washington, D.C.*

- 1 **Physical disabilities and/or health limitations;**
- 2 **Mental health problems;**
- 3 **Health or behavioral problems of children;**
- 4 **Substance abuse;**
- 5 **Domestic violence;**
- 6 **Involvement with the child welfare system;**
- 7 **Housing instability,**
- 8 **Low basic skills and learning disabilities.**

*The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Urban Institute, its board, its sponsors, or other authors in the series. Prepared for the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation and the Administration for Children and Families. The previous excerpts were reprinted with permission of the authors. For the entire report, call the Urban Institute at 202- 833-7200.*

## Inside a Steering Committee Focusing on the Center's Future

Recently the Clarendon Hill Towers Neighborhood Networks Center of Somerville, Massachusetts, celebrated its grand opening. The same evening its Steering Committee focused on establishing a business plan. The Steering Committee tackled the business plan in hopes that it will ensure the center's operation for several years.

As the members of the Steering Committee soon realized, the challenge is knowing where to start. "This committee guides the center and how it can serve the residents," said Rich Collins, president of 3X Software and consultant to the Neighborhood Networks Center, adding that long-term goals must be established.

However, some members felt the momentum of the grand opening was the most important topic. "Do we take action on developing the plan or focus on our momentum or both?" asked Mr. Collins. The committee, consisting of several residents, members of the community, consultants, and volunteer interns, voted to take action on offers made at the grand opening.

"We've done the easy part. The hard part is setting the milestones and maintaining the momentum and scheduling the outreach to residents," said Joe Mulchahy, resident and President of the tenant association.

"We have a lot of momentum going. The community is offering to help out. Residents are signing up and yet will have to wait two or three weeks to get into a class. Perhaps we need to seek out another instructor. We don't want to give them time to lose interest," said Mr. Mulchahy. Paul Trane, Director of Communications for the City of Somerville and a guest of the Steering Committee, recognized the problem and offered to ask a few local teachers to volunteer time at the center.

Mr. Trane also said he could link the center to the Internet, connect to the city's web page, or assist the center in creating its own web page with links to community resources and information.

Committee members assigned subcommittees to develop the business plan and decided to meet monthly. Mr. Mulchahy said one key to a successful Steering Committee is to keep the meetings short.

The Clarendon Hill Towers Steering Committee is using the *Neighborhood Networks Resource Guide* to establish its business plan and focus on the center's sustainability. For more information on steering committees and establishing a business plan, contact Dan McCormick at 301-519-6718. For a *Resource Guide*, please call our Neighborhood Network Information Center at 1-888-312-2743. □

## Gifts In Kind Works with Neighborhood Networks

Gifts In Kind has agreed to join the list of national Neighborhood Networks partners. Gifts In Kind is the leading charity in the field of product philanthropy and is an important addition to our partnership team. It has distributed more than \$1 billion in newly-manufactured products to tens of thousands of charities in the United States and internationally through its The Agency Partner (TAP) and Retail Donation Partner (RDP) programs. New unused products include office supplies and equipment, clothing, children's items, personal care products, and building materials. Organizations like Neighborhood Networks, who are registered with Gifts In Kind receive regular announcements of available products and, from the list, request what they need. Call the Neighborhood Networks Information Center at 1-888-312-2743 for more information. □

## Residents at Plumley Village East Use Center to Find Jobs

The center at Plumley Village East opened its doors in September 1995, and about 340 residents have used the center for resume writing and job searches and about 70 have found jobs in clerical, health care, retail, insurance and manufacturing positions. The center offers programs including GED preparation, computer skills, workforce readiness, and job development.

The property owner financed the startup with a number of community partners. The Greater Worcester Community Foundation provided funding for a part-time case manager. The Massachusetts Department of Education provided funding for a GED teacher and Community Builders, the Fallon Health Care Facility, and the Massachusetts Academy for Math and Science have also helped the center. For further information, contact Tom Stokes at 508-770-0508. □

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# Welfare WORK

## Neighborhood Networks Can Meet the Goal

Welfare-to-work programs, such as Neighborhood Networks, are the answer for those living on public assistance, which may be dramatically reduced or end entirely under the new welfare law.

The key provisions of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, more commonly referred to as components of welfare reform, show striking alterations in the national system of public assistance to low-income families.

According to the Act, separate funds such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Emergency Assistance (EA), and JOBS are now combined into a single capped entitlement: a block grant called Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). Each state, not the federal government, has the responsibility for enforcing the provisions and using the block grant funds to meet goals of welfare reform. The new law also establishes demanding work participation goals.

Each year, the states must involve one-fourth of TANF households in work activities (rising to one-half in 2002) or face large financial penalties. The minimum amount of time for a single parent to spend in work activities rises from 20 hours per week to 30 hours per week by the year 2000. States must adopt their TANF plans by July 1.

In addition to the work requirements, the new law stipulates changes in funds previously earmarked for child care, legal immigrant eligibility, and food stamps. Subsidies will be increased for child care and support, but the defi-

nition of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) for disabled children has been amended. Other changes under the law are the restriction of benefits for legal immigrants and a time limit of three months for food stamp eligibility for non-employed adults with no dependent children. Those adults will not lose their food stamps if they are working or participating in an employment and training program.

This is where Neighborhood Networks Centers can make a difference. Neighborhood Networks Centers, nationwide, provide job training with personal computers, learning in programs such as General Education Degree (GED) certificates and English as a Second Language (ESL), and help people find, or better, their employment opportunities. Putting people to work is vital as the new welfare law will likely reduce a family's ability to pay its rent.

Each Neighborhood Networks Center is a project that encourages public-private partnerships among a center's residents and local officials, businesses, corporate foundations, universities, and local housing managers. Using public-private partnerships, Neighborhood Networks Centers address the needs of residents without government assistance. Partnerships encourage a community's commitment to moving residents from welfare to work.

Throughout this newsletter, there are examples of how Neighborhood Networks Centers make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities and in meeting the goals of welfare reform. □

Yolonda Brawley

## In the News

Neighborhood Networks has appeared in more than 50 publications, including major dailies, weeklies and trade publications. In addition, print coverage has included 39 properties, 22 states and 35 cities since January 1996. Electronic media coverage has now expanded to include 27 television and cable stations in 17 cities and four major media markets.

In May, the Neighborhood Networks story reached Fairbanks, Alaska, where two television stations and the local *Daily News Miner* covered the grand opening at the **Executive Estates Apartments** in Fairbanks.

In April, the grand opening of an NN Center at the **Tommie Rose Gardens** in Omaha, NE attracted print, radio and television media. The ABC and CBS television affiliates and a major local news radio station, KKAR-AM, featured the event. Another opening at the **Mount View Apartments** in Albuquerque, New Mexico received significant news coverage through three television stations: KOAT, KOB, and KRQE.

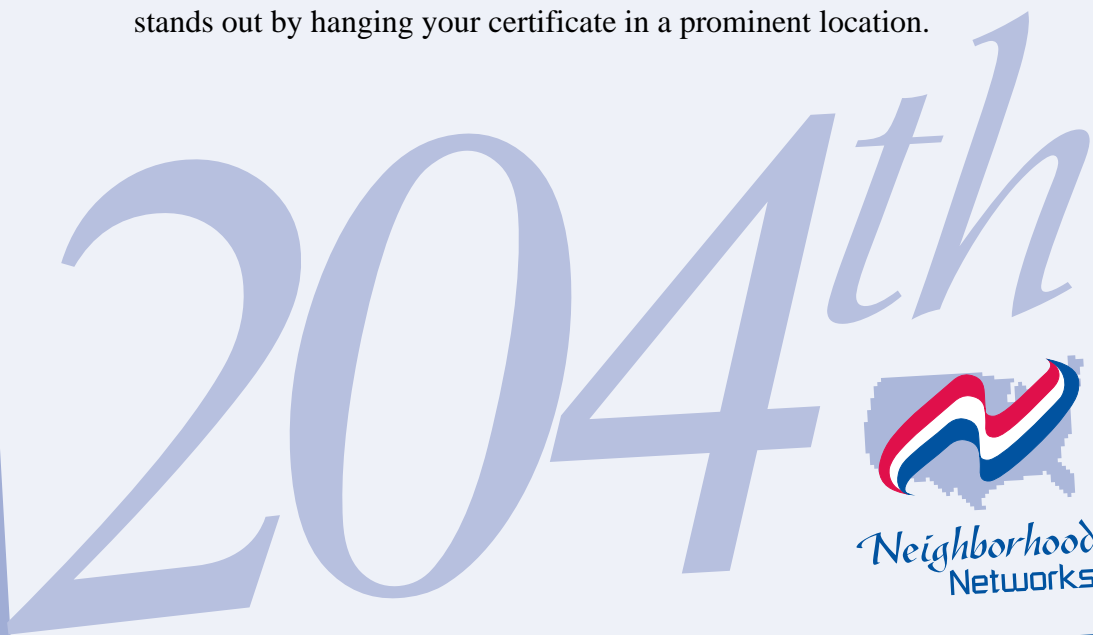
One of the most successful media turnouts occurred at the April grand opening of the **Chandler Village Apartments** in Chandler, Arizona. The Mesa Tribune and three local television stations, KPHP, KPNX and KTVW, aired the story. Phoenix Suns player Horacio Llamas and KPHP TV-5 news anchor Carol Cavazos joined Chandler Village's 411 residents in the ceremony.

Coverage of the March grand opening of **Banyon Street Manor** in Honolulu, Hawaii, was provided by the Honolulu Star-Bulletin. In March, the Providence Journal Bulletin in Rhode Island also ran a feature story on the grand opening at the **Kent Farm Village Apartments**.

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### **Neighborhood Network Certificates!**

For every Neighborhood Networks Center that celebrates a Grand Opening, HUD now issues a personalized certificate. For centers already operating, expect a certificate in the mail soon. These certificates are a great way to identify your Neighborhood Networks Center to everyone who visits. Make sure your center stands out by hanging your certificate in a prominent location.



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